

SHIELD WEEKLY

TRUE STORIES FROM
FAMOUS CHIEFS

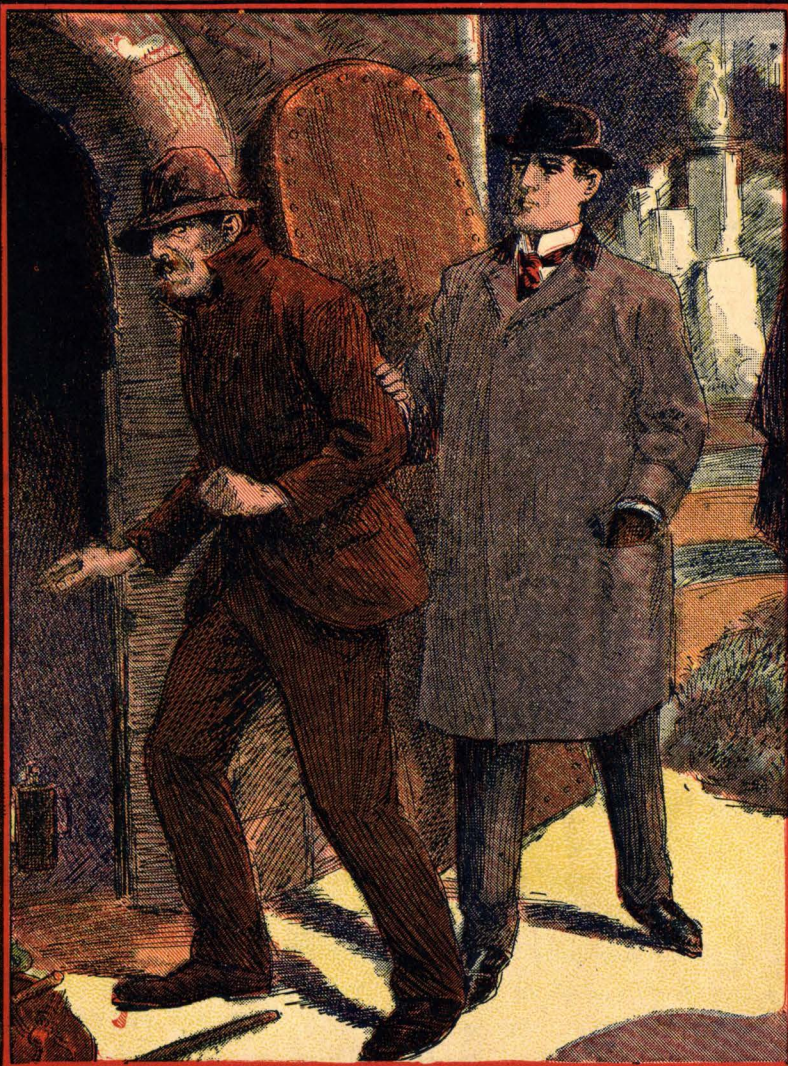


THE NOTE-BOOKS OF
OF POLICE

ARRESTED AT THE TOMB

or Sheridan Keene on a Curious Case

BY ALDEN F. BRADSHAW



SHIELD WEEKLY

TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES • STRANGER THAN FICTION

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Arrested at the Tomb;

OR,

SHERIDAN KEENE ON A CURIOUS CASE.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

THE GAYLORD SWINDLE.

"Do you realize, Mr. Berkley, that the life of Calvin Miller may be seriously in jeopardy at this very moment?"

"Certainly I realize it."

"Then, sir," said Sheridan Keene, with some feeling, "the sooner I land in Maine, and in his immediate locality, the better."

"So I think, Detective Keene. When can you leave here?"

"By to-night's Pullman."

The two speakers were seated in the elegant private office of Mr. Amos K. Berkley, the genial and venerable president of the great Federal Life Insurance Company, in the company's new building in Milk street, Boston.

He held a letter in his hand, and his gravely earnest eyes were raised to the face of the young detective.

They had been discussing one of those mysterious and puzzling cases that occasionally come up in the offices of insurance companies, but this one seemed to be more than usually perplexing.

Indeed, it had only been after the insurance company felt itself unable to cope with some threatened swindle that the aid of the police had been called in.

Mr. Berkley's request to Chief Watts that he should send him one of his best men had resulted in Detective Keene being detailed on the case. On his arrival at the Federal Insurance Company's office he was immediately ushered into the presence of the president.

"You look like quite a young man, Detective Keene, to be confided with so delicate and perilous a mission as the one we require executed," were the president's first words, after Detective Keene had introduced himself.

"Perhaps, sir, my head is older than my countenance," said Sheridan Keene, dryly.

Sheridan Keene's response pleased Mr. Berkley. Despite Keene's youthful exterior and an unassuming manner, his answer had indicated a man of conscious ability and power.

"As a matter of fact, Detective Keene, we do sometimes find old heads on young shoulders," replied Mr. Berkley. "Chief Watts recommends you so highly in this letter of introduction, moreover, that I am satisfied that his judgment in this case is more reliable than my discernment. Take a chair, Detective Keene, and I will tell you of what this mission consists."

Keene accepted the chair indicated.

Mr. Berkley laid aside the letter which the detective had brought with him from Chief Inspector Watts, then turned his chair so as to face Keene more directly, first glancing at the office door to be sure that it was closed.

"Detective Keene," he began, "I have suspicions that our company is in imminent danger of being defrauded."

"And the felony has not yet been perpetrated?"

"That is the idea precisely," nodded Mr. Berkley. "I mention this at once, because it is just possible that the case may not require official interference."

"Is there a large amount involved, sir?"

"About one hundred thousand dollars."

"Life insurance?"

"Life insurance, and all on the life of one person. Doubtless you are well aware, Detective Keene," added Mr. Berkley, "that life insurance companies are occasionally victim-

ized by unscrupulous persons and fraudulent methods, and sometimes swindled out of very large sums of money."

"Perfectly, sir," bowed Sheridan Keene.

"This case, however," continued Mr. Berkley, "is somewhat different from those we usually have to deal with in that there are several other companies involved. I am acting, understand, for both the Federal and also for these other companies."

"I understand you, sir," answered Keene; then he continued: "One hundred thousand dollars is quite a large insurance for a single individual to carry on his life."

"It is a very large insurance, Detective Keene."

"It is an unfortunate fact that crime is sometimes invited in this way," said Keene, gravely. "Who, Mr. Berkley, is the holder of the policies to that amount?"

"The gentleman's name is Calvin Miller," was the reply. "He is the president of the Great Northern Lumber Company, located in the State of Maine."

"How old a man is he?"

"He is now about fifty-four."

"A man of high social standing?"

"Very," nodded Mr. Berkley. "And he has been identified with the lumber business along the Penobscot for the past thirty years."

"I presume, then, that he is wealthy."

"He is rated at a quarter of a million."

"Then, if the rating is correct, he carries a life insurance nearly equal to half of his entire fortune."

"Precisely, Detective Keene."

The detective drew his chair a little nearer. His face had become more grave, and the glow of his earnest eyes indicated a steadily increasing interest. His fine, forceful countenance had now won the other completely.

Keene broke the momentary silence.

"Aside from the aggregate of these policies, Mr. Berkley," he asked; "have you any

reason for suspecting that a fraud upon the several insurance companies is contemplated?"

"Yes, Detective Keene, I have," replied President Berkley. "There is an anterior case to that of Calvin Miller, however, and I first wish to call your attention to the former."

"It has a bearing, then, on the Miller case?"

"Decidedly. I will state the facts as concisely as possible."

And the venerable gentleman opposite began the following extraordinary statement:

"The anterior case mentioned," said he, "refers to a policy issued by our company, insuring the life of one Thomas Gaylord. On the 12th of September, 1893, an application for a policy was regularly made through our agent in the city of Worcester, for an insurance of five thousand dollars on the life of said Gaylord."

"I follow you, sir."

"The customary reports, relating to the application and to the applicant, were submitted to me by our agent; and Gaylord appeared for physical examination before our medical examiner in Worcester, one Dr. George Varney. The report of the physician was acceptable, stating that the subject was then in good health; and, as the application appeared regular, and our agent was believed to be reliable, the policy was executed. Eight months later, Detective Keene, Thomas Gaylord died of consumption."

"Of consumption?"

"Precisely, sir."

"Is it not rather unusual, that a man reported to be in good health in September," observed Keene, "should have died of consumption in the following May?"

"It is so unusual, Detective Keene, that before paying the assignee named in the Gaylord policy we made an investigation.

We suspected that a man in perfect health had been substituted in the place of Gaylord when the medical examination was made by our physician, Dr. Varney."

"Could you establish that to have been the fact?"

"We could not," replied President Berkley. "Unfortunately Dr. Varney had died the previous January, and hence we could not have his personal identification of the subject examined."

"That was bad, sir."

"Our agent stated, however, that he was positive that Gaylord had been properly examined, and that the policy had been properly drawn up and executed. The description of the subject, therein contained, so nearly corresponded to the physical characteristics of Gaylord that we decided not to contest the case, and accordingly five thousand dollars was paid to the assignee through our agent in Worcester."

"What was the agent's name?" inquired Keene, drawing out his notebook.

"William Bennett."

"Is he now in your employ?"

"No, sir," replied Mr. Berkley, quite decisively.

"Do you know where he is located?"

"I will refer to that a little later, if you please. You may ask any other question, however."

"Who was the assignee named in the policy?"

"Nellie Gaylord, the wife of the deceased."

"Do you know where she now may be found?"

"I will refer also to her a little later."

"I infer that you know in both cases," smiled Sheridan Keene, as he noted the woman's name. "Now, sir, in brief, you thought that you could not prove that Gaylord was not the man examined by Dr. Varney, and rather than undertake a suit at

law to avoid paying the policy, you settled with the assignee at its face value?"

"Precisely, Detective Keene."

"Were any comparisons made between the signatures of Gaylord on the policy and other specimens of his handwriting executed at about the time the application was made?"

"Yes, such a comparison was made, and the likeness was so exact that we decided the signatures were genuine."

"Did you submit the question to an expert in chirography?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because," replied President Berkley; "if that was the only tangible evidence we could offer in court, we knew it would be useless to undertake a legal fight."

"And you could secure no other evidence?"

"None warranting a suit at law, sir."

"What was Gaylord's business at the time he applied for insurance?"

"He was a butcher, and lived near the town of Natick."

"Character good?"

"It was said to be."

"Have you anything further to offer relative to this case of Gaylord?"

"Merely a general statement of my personal opinion, although I could not, neither then nor now, prove the facts," replied Mr. Berkley. "I now fully believe that Gaylord knew absolutely nothing about this policy on his life. I think that a substitute was examined by Dr. Varney; that Gaylord's signatures to the policy were forgeries, and that at least three persons were concerned in a conspiracy by which the Federal Company was successfully defrauded of five thousand dollars."

"One, the man's wife, Nellie Gaylord?"

"Precisely! Also William Bennett, our agent at that time."

"I have the name, sir. And the third?"

"There I am at sea, Detective Keene," said President Berkley, gravely. "But I refer to the man who must have impersonated Gaylord at the time Dr. Varney made an examination of the alleged applicant for the policy."

"Can you give me no information whatever that might lead to establishing the man's identity?"

President Berkley shook his head.

"Absolutely none," he replied. "We have not the least idea."

"Yet you have the policy said to have been executed by Gaylord, containing his signatures," suggested Keene.

"Yes, we have that."

"Will you allow me to keep it for a time?"

"Gladly, sir, if you can use it to any advantage," replied Mr. Berkley, touching a bell on his desk. "I will have one of my clerks procure it for you."

"Meantime," added Sheridan Keene, "I will hear what you have to impart about the Miller case, which I understand to be the one you want me to investigate. I think you implied that this case of Gaylord appears to have some suspicious relation to it."

"Rather, sir, some of the parties involved in it are the same!" exclaimed President Berkley.

"What do you mean?"

"Detective Keene," said Mr. Berkley, pointedly, "I mean that Nellie Gaylord is now the wife of Mr. Miller, who is carrying a life insurance of one hundred thousand dollars!"

"Ah! is that so?" cried Keene, with a quick flash of his dark eyes.

CHAPTER II.

A LIFE THREATENED.

The occasion for Sheridan Keene's exclamation became apparent in his next words

"Then," said he, "if the Gaylord case was

indeed a fraud, this woman may possibly be a very dangerous person, if not guilty even of having hastened Gaylord's death in some way."

"That has occurred to me, also."

"Mr. Berkley, when did you discover that Nellie Gaylord is now the wife of Calvin Miller, the Maine lumberman?"

"Rather more than two years ago," was the reply. "Mr. Miller was insured in our company for ten thousand dollars. The application was made through our agent in Bangor, Mr. John Berkley."

"Is John Berkley a relative of yours?"

"He is my nephew, Detective Keene, and a man I know to be perfectly honorable, and of good judgment and executive ability."

"Go on, sir."

"We looked Miller up, and found him reputed a man of wealth and high social standing. It appeared perfectly natural that he should wish to take out an insurance to that amount, as he had been married about three years previous, and the assignee named in the policy was his wife, Eleanor Miller."

"Eleanor Miller, instead of Nellie Gaylord, eh?"

"Precisely," nodded Mr. Berkley. "Yet I, of course, had no thought of that at the time."

"Naturally not."

"The usual forms were complied with," continued Mr. Berkley, "and a policy insuring Miller for ten thousand dollars was executed, his wife being the assignee named."

"About a month ago," continued Mr. Berkley, "my nephew in Bangor incidentally discovered that Miller is also carrying a policy for ten thousand dollars in the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company. He reported the fact to me, and I called upon the president of that company to make inquiries. I found the report not only to be correct, but also that the application for that policy

had been received through one of the Massachusetts company's agents in Maine, who has an office both in Bangor and Skowhegan. The name of that agent is William Bennett."

"Not the same Bennett who was in your employ seven years ago?"

"Precisely the same, sir!"

"You begin to interest me," said Sheridan Keene, in his quietly significant way. "Please continue."

"I carried my investigation a little further," Mr. Berkley went on; "and I learned that Bennett is acting as agent for several other life insurance companies and three fire insurance companies. It took me some little time to unearth all of these facts, for I exercised considerable care lest he should become informed of my sudden interest in him and his doings."

"A wise precaution," nodded Keene, approvingly.

"To make a long story short, Detective Keene, I found that Calvin Miller is now insured in these several companies to the amount stated. This, however, may be perfectly legitimate, and only the fact that William Bennett was the agent through whom most of the applications had been made led me to become suspicious."

"Your previous experience with Bennett perfectly justifies a suspicion, sir."

"So I thought," bowed President Berkley.

"What further steps did you take?"

"I sent one of my clerks to Maine to make sure that Bennett was the identical man formerly in our employ. This was easily established to be the fact. I also instructed my clerk, who had been one of the investigators of the Gaylord case, to quietly get a look at Mrs. Eleanor Miller, the assignee in the policy involved."

"Did he do so?"

"He succeeded in seeing her unobserved, and at once recognized her as the former

wife of Thomas Gaylord, to whom we had paid five thousand dollars on the death of her husband. That, Detective Keene, is the situation."

As Mr. Berkley finished Detective Keene leaned forward and uttered the words which open this story. He realized that Miller's wife might be plotting, if not personally effecting, his death, in order to secure this insurance.

All his detective instinct had been aroused by the disclosures Mr. Berkley had just made, and he resolved to lose no time in getting on the track of the criminals.

"I certainly think it is a case warranting investigation," said Sheridan Keene, with a peculiar smile, as he rose to take his leave. "The combination of circumstances is certainly very suspicious."

"Yet I do not wish to take decisive action upon suspicious circumstances only," President Berkley gravely objected. "From all I can learn, Miller is an honest man; and his means warrant his carrying this large insurance, if he so desires. It is quite possible that he contemplates no fraud, and I cannot wisely prefer charges against him without having more evidence than mere conjectures, based upon the fact that his wife was the widow of Thomas Gaylord, and that William Bennett was the agent in both cases. As we did not refuse to pay the Gaylord policy, moreover, and sustain a suit at law, we should be lamentably weak in now reviving that case as evidence against Miller, who, so far as we can learn, knew nothing of that case at the time, nor of the parties involved."

"That is true."

"What I now want of you, Detective Keene," concluded President Berkley, "is to make a quiet investigation of the affair."

"I will do so, sir."

"I want it done, moreover, without the knowledge of the several parties involved."

"I will insure that that is avoided."

"Yet their present designs, if felonious, must be discovered."

"I think you may safely leave that to me, sir."

"And if you decide that Miller is honest in these transactions, and that the policies have been taken out with a legitimate motive, I want no disclosures made that may reveal our suspicions and the extent of our investigation."

"There shall be no disclosures made, in that case," replied Keene.

"Very good!" replied Mr. Berkley. "I will give you a check to cover early expenses, and you may draw on me at sight for——"

"Pardon, sir! I shall have no communication with the Federal Insurance Company while I am in that neighborhood in your employ," interposed Keene. "It possibly may be the scene of a diabolical conspiracy, if not, indeed, already the scene of some hideous crime. I say this in confidence to you, sir, as being what my detective instinct tells me lies under the surface of such facts as you have revealed. Whether Calvin Miller is honest or not, sir, I believe his life to be in imminent danger."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Mr. Berkley. "Yet I admit that you may be right."

"I am sure of it, sir," said Keene, decisively. "I shall leave for Maine to-night."

"What co-operation do you desire from this end, Detective Keene, if any?"

"I have but one word to say about that, sir," was the reply.

"And that?"

"From the time I leave this office as a detective in your employ, sir, I want this case and its investigation left entirely to me, without interference or disclosures of any kind on your part, regardless of what occurs," said Keene, with forcible earnestness. "On

no other condition will I undertake the investigation."

President Berkley now began to see the stuff of which Sheridan Keene was made. He impulsively extended his hand, saying, warmly:

"I give you my word, sir, the investigation shall devolve entirely upon you."

"Regardless of what occurs?"

"Precisely, sir."

"And without disclosures tending to betray your present suspicion and the work on which I am engaged?"

"I give you my word to that effect, sir."

"With that understanding, President Berkley, I will accept the case."

"Very good, sir!"

"Now write me a line of introduction to your nephew in Bangor, and hand me the old Gaylord policy, and I will bid you good-morning."

"And you will start for Maine?"

"To-night!"

CHAPTER III.

ACCIDENT, SUICIDE OR MURDER?

"Thet air's a tough, hard nut to crack, stranger, an' mebbe you'd know it as well as me, hed yer done sarvice as coroner on as many dead bodies as I hev," vouchsafed long, lanky and angular Jim Barry, nodding emphasis at the man seated near the flat, leather-top desk on which this rural dignitary was himself perched, and which served him as frequently for a seat as for the purpose intended.

For Jim Barry's legs were so long that, as their owner expressed it, "the hinge in 'em come higher'n the seat of a chair, an' made sittin' durned uncomfortable!"

The man to whom he had addressed the above was Sheridan Keene.

The detective had arrived in Bangor early that day, only to read in the morning local

papers the startling news that Calvin Miller had met his death by accidental drowning the previous evening.

The details of the accident were but meagerly reported, however, not having been received when the papers went to press; and the several stories of the calamity were devoted chiefly to a history of Miller's successful business career, his sterling integrity as a man, and his identification with the lumber business along the Penobscot.

Concerning the accident, it was stated only that Miller had gone out about dusk to survey a jam of logs in the river near the Great Northern Company's mills; and that, while attempting to examine the same from some rather hazardous point of vantage, he had fallen into the river and had been carried under the jam.

"I'm by no means ready to swallow that yarn!" was Keene's immediate decision, on reading the several reports. "Evidently I am just one day too late to save Miller from death—but not too late to bring his murderers to justice! Now to run them down at a canter!"

In the light of the information he already possessed, he felt very confident of the result; but he little dreamed of the desperate contingencies involved.

He delayed in Bangor only to wire back to President Berkley that Miller was dead, and that any action on the part of the several insurance companies, or their agents, must be rigidly delayed pending his investigations.

The message having been forwarded, he took the first train up the river to the thriving town in which the mills of the Great Northern Lumber Company were located.

Although a total stranger in the place, Keene very speedily ascertained what resident would be most likely able to give him the information he wished first of all to

acquire; and within a half-hour of setting foot in town he was seated in the office of Mr. Jim Barry, above introduced.

Within a circle of twenty miles strong Jim Barry was a well-known figure. He did a little law in a crude but effective fashion; he was a justice of the peace and a notary public; he had been district coroner for nearly a generation; and for ten years in earlier life he had filled the boots of county sheriff, and had, during this term of office, incidentally emptied the boots of as many desperate offenders.

He was rough, uncouth, and but narrowly educated; yet the "horse" sense of Jim Barry was reputed fit to bank on, and what Jim Barry said round about the local diggings invariably "went."

He looked down at Sheridan Keene out of his cold gray eyes, twisted his sparse chin whiskers to a sharp point, spat out the broom straw he had been busily chewing, and now supplemented his first observation with the remark:

"I reckon you're right, stranger, when yer say a violent death allas results from accident, suicide or murder; but, as I said afore, the deciding which o' the three is correct, air sometimes a tough, hard nut to crack."

"Right you are, Mr. Barry," assented Sheridan Keene, with a genial head-shake. "I suppose you were pretty well acquainted with Mr. Miller, weren't you?"

"Me!" exclaimed Barry, much as if he could not quite understand the need for such a question. "Wal, I should say I wuz! I reckon I knew old man Miller better'n any man along the Penobscot, from source to mouth. Him and me's been hand an' glove for nigh forty years, stranger. Slept together as kids; fit an' played together as boys; an' as men hev allas hung together like brothers. I should say we wuz acquainted, stranger!"

"Pretty square man, wasn't he?"

"Squar as a brick, sir, every time! Word as good as his bond! Stiff as an oak stick in all his business dealings, sir; an' a man could allas tell where he'd find Calvin Miller."

"Can you inform me how this accident occurred, Mr. Barry?"

"Wal, I reckon I can," nodded Barry, pushing back his slouch hat from his forehead. "'Twas like this, stranger, an' I get it from Dave Graff, who saw the hull thing. Cal kem out o' the mill just afore dusk, along with Dave, an' the two on 'em went down to the river to look at a jam of logs atween the dam and the lock. You see, stranger, the river runs high i' the spring; an' the logs comin' down jam up in durned bad shape at times, an' it's an all-fired job to clear 'em."

"So I've heard, sir."

"'Tis, fur a fact! Wal, sir, Miller went out on the jam along with Graff, so Dave tells it, so's they could get a look at the mess from the outside. It was comin' kind o' dark about that time, I reckon, an' Miller must hev lost his footin' on the logs, or else didn't see his way over well. For the fust thing Graff knew, Miller had plunked down atween some o' the loose logs, and gone out o' sight under the hull cussed mess."

"What did Mr. Graff do?" inquired Keene, whose face in no way depicted the thought which had risen in his mind.

"Dave ran back and gave the alarm, as quick as ever he could; an' some o' the mill hands went down with him to try to get the body. But, Lord sakes alive, stranger! They mout as well a tried to hook up the bottom o' the stream!"

"They did not find it?"

"Find it!" echoed Barry, with dismal derision. "They never did an' never will! Cal Miller went down amongst them logs, he went down to stay, sir, and if ever the man's body should show up ag'in, it'll be crushed out o' shape an' out o' recognition."

"By the logs?"

"Aye, sir," nodded Barry; "by the logs."

"Yet I noticed fully a hundred men searching the river between the bridge and the mill dam," said Keene. "From that I inferred that they hoped to recover the remains."

"Thet's Dave Graff's doings, an' Mrs. Miller's," explained Barry, with a growl. "They figger the body may hev gone under the jam, and'll be carried down the river by the strong flow o' the stream. But 'tain't likely, sir; an' if they had any horse sense they'd know it. Ther body'll be ground to jelly afore this day's done, sir, an' be swept away piecemeal by the stream. No, no, stranger! they'll never find the body o' poor Cal Miller."

"A sad accident," said Keene, quietly.

"Aye, sir, it was!"

"Miller was married, I think I understood you to say?"

"'Bout four years ago, sir."

"To a lady living here?"

"No, stranger, not here. She was a widder named Gaylord, an' hailed from somewhere in Massachusetts. I reckon Miller loved her years ago, afore she was married the fust time, though I'm not sure on it. But I've heerd suthin' o' the kind, sir; and I know Cal was anxious enough to get after her, as soon as he larned her fust husband was dead. They were married 'bout four years ago."

"Nice looking woman?"

"Ruther!" nodded Barry. "An' I reckon she led Cal quite a canter even arter they were hitched."

"How so?"

"Wal," drawled Barry, in a ruminating way; "I reckon she's been pretty thick with Dave Graff, or so it's said, and I guess Miller was summut jealous. Still, stranger, she hed him well under her thumb; an' there's allas the devil to pay when a man knuckles

down to a woman. He allas did what she said, right enough, an' thet's about the hull of it."

"You don't imagine, Mr. Barry," inquired Keene; "that Miller committed suicide last night because of his wife's conduct, do you?"

"Not by a jugful!" cried Barry, with a decisive shake of his head. "He'd never hev done thet, sir! 'Twan't like him."

"Then the theory of suicide in this case of a violent death may be set aside as wholly improbable," observed Keene.

"Aye, sir, it may!"

"Who is this man you call Graff?"

"Dave Graff? He's the manager round about the mill."

"An old resident here?"

"Not he!" cried Barry, with a rather grimly significant intonation. "He showed up here shortly arter Miller married Mrs. Gaylord; and the woman claimed he was a second cousin o' hers, an' got Miller to give him his present job in the mill."

"Where does Graff hail from, do you know?"

"Wal, no, I don't; I reckon no one round about here can tell thet. As a matter o' fact, stranger, Dave Graff ain't much liked in these diggings."

"Why is that? Is he off color in any way?"

"No, 'tain't thet. But he's a stiff sort o' chap, an' don't make friends over easy."

"How about Mrs. Miller?"

"Wal, she seems like one o' the same push. The wimmen folks don't like her."

"At about what hour did this accident occur, Mr. Barry?"

"'Bout half-past six, I reckon."

"Had the mills shut down for the day?"

"Yes, sir, same as usual. They knock off at six, sir."

"I presume, then, that there were not many of the mill hands about to have ob-

served the accident?" remarked Keene, inquiringly.

"None at all, stranger!" replied Barry, drawing no special inference from Keene's seemingly indifferent questions. "What few heard Dave Graff's yell for help were out in the front part of the mill gettin' ready for home."

Sheridan Keene arose to his feet, and tendered the speaker a cigar.

He had ascertained the general character of the local situation, and acquired what information he wanted before tackling the case in a more energetic way.

"Thankee, stranger!" exclaimed Jim Barry, as he accepted the cigar. "An' now, sense you've pumped me all yer want to, sposen yer tell me what it's all about."

Keene smiled pleasantly at this display of curiosity, and handed Mr. Barry a card.

"My name is Green, and here is my card," he said, with a curious little smile. "I am a press representative, sir, and wanted the facts of this accident from some thoroughly reliable citizen."

Barry silently surveyed him with a half-doubtful squint for a moment, then dryly rejoined:

"Yer name may be Green, stranger, but I'm durned if yer look like a green 'un!"

Sheridan Keene laughed lightly, and now extended his hand.

"Howsomever, stranger," added Barry; "call ag'in when yer happen round this way and air lookin' fur pints, an' ole Jim Barry'll give 'em to yer."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Barry," nodded Keene, shaking his hand. "I will certainly do so."

"An' say! I reckon I know as much about things an' people round here as any man in leather. In fact, stranger, if I had a leather back, I'd be a durned good local cyclopedia! Run in ag'in, stranger, when you come this way."

CHAPTER IV.

SHERIDAN KEENE GETS DOWN TO WORK.

It was nearly noon when Keene left Barry's office, and he at once headed for the river, where the entire gang of mill hands, and all the outside help David Graff could secure, had been pressed into service in searching for Calvin Miller's dead body.

"This clever move may blind the local bright lights," said Keene to himself, as he approached the river bank; "but, fortunately, I have developed a faculty for seeing through a ladder. I think, Mr. David Graff, you and I must cross weapons. But I will hold off till after you have found Calvin Miller's body—or some other body!"

Keene now had no doubt that he had run upon as daring and crafty a scoundrel as is often found at large.

All of the data he had secured pointed not only to an attempt to defraud the insurance companies, but also to a most foul and dastardly murder.

The previous Gaylord case; the early appearance of Graff in this locality soon after Mrs. Gaylord's marriage to Miller; the alleged relation between the two, with an intimacy which finally had attracted public attention and roused Miller's jealousy; the fact that Graff alone had been Miller's companion at the time of the alleged accident, and that he only had witnessed it—in the judgment of Sheridan Keene, already suspicious, these closely related circumstances indicated with startling significance not only that Dave Graff and Mrs. Miller were a decidedly bad lot, but also that they were plotting desperately after a fortune, and to be permanently rid of Miller at the same time.

Sheridan Keene realized, however, that it was one thing to entertain these convictions, and quite another matter to be able to prove them to the satisfaction of a judge and jury.

"The evidence of their guilt! The irre-

futable evidence of it, is what I now must secure!" he said to himself, concluding his review of the case as he neared the river bank. "But I yet will have it, Mr. Dave Graff, and you in the bargain!"

His glance over the stirring scene took in the work that was being done. A score of boats was scattered over the broad river, each manned by a crew with drag-nets and grappling-irons, engaged in a systematic dragging of the river.

Upon the shelving bank nearly a hundred interested spectators were gathered, and prominent among these Keene soon discovered the man he was seeking.

With a view to the design he now had in mind, the detective bound his handkerchief about his right hand, and presently inquired of one of the spectators:

"I suppose that man directing the work is Mr. Graff, isn't it?"

He had not particularly noticed the man he addressed; but when the fellow turned and faced him, his suspicious glance led Keene to observe him more closely.

He was quite a powerful man of about fifty years, with a swarthy complexion, unkempt hair, and a heavy black beard. He was roughly clad in a woolen shirt, a soiled dogskin jacket, and his pants were tucked into a pair of thick cowhide boots.

Though the man's makeup would have passed muster with an ordinary observer, Sheridan Keene instantly detected that the man was disguised. Keene had learned, however, to make such discoveries without self-betrayal.

"I dunno," rejoined the fellow, hoarsely. "You'll hev to ask some 'un else."

"Are you a stranger in these parts?"

The man frowned darkly, as if resenting the question, then growled through his heavy beard:

"Yes, I am! I am a logger from up Canada way."

"I thought you perhaps knew Graff by sight."

"I don't know anyone hereabouts, and don't want to, nuther!"

"Well, I want to know you, and I propose to, also," said Keene to himself, as he moved up the bank. "This mystery deepens, when a disguised man springs up at just this time like a mushroom in a night. I say, youngster, is that Dave Graff?"

"Yes, sir," cried the lad, whom Keene had addressed. "Here, Mr. Graff! Here's a gentleman looking for you!"

Dave Graff turned up from the water's edge and ascended the slope of the bank. He was a well-built man of forty, with a rather attractive dark face and sharp black eyes. He gave Keene a searching look as he approached him; but said, courteously enough:

"What do you want of me, sir?"

Keene handed him a card similar to that given Jim Barry.

"I am an Associated Press representative," he explained, "and my friend, Mr. Barry, up here, said you would doubtless give me the details of this sad affair. Mr. Miller having been a prominent man about here, we would like to properly notice this sad episode. I speak for the syndicate of papers I represent, sir."

Keene surmised that, if his suspicions were correct, Dave Graff would instantly snap at an opportunity to give publicity to his version of the affair, and to laud his own conduct; and the detective had hit the nail on the head.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Graff, quickly extending his hand. "Glad to know you, Mr. Green."

"Thanks," bowed Keene, smiling. "Pardon my left hand, sir. I wrenched the other when getting off the train, and it's quite lame. May I have a brief interview with you a little later?"

"Yes, surely! At your convenience, Mr. Green."

"Rather consult your own, Mr. Graff, for my time is less valuable than yours, when such sad duties devolve on you," replied Keene, with an artful display of solicitude. "I shall wire the interview for the morning editions in Boston and New York, and any early hour of the afternoon will answer."

"It is now noon," said Graff, consulting his watch. "The men will now knock off for dinner, and I, too, am going to lunch."

"Perhaps you can secure me a brief interview with Mrs. Miller, also," suggested Keene.

"The very thing!" exclaimed Graff. "I am to lunch informally with her, and you can accompany me. You will find her in deep bereavement, however, but I presume you will be able to stand that."

It was said with a curious smile and in a curious tone, and Keene responded, dryly:

"Well, I will try to weather it."

Graff laughed and took his arm.

"Come on, then," said he. "We will go up there at once. Awful thing, this, but I am in hopes we'll find the body."

Keene would have been willing to bet that he would ultimately fish up some body, and even that he then knew where it was located. He was sure that Dave Graff was not putting up for nothing this big bluff at a search after Miller's remains; but what his precise object was remained to be discovered.

"Yes, I hope you will," he rejoined. "The widow will feel so much better, knowing her poor husband is in the ground, rather than food for the fishes."

This seemed to tickle Dave Graff, for he chuckled deeply, and rejoined:

"Not much choice between the worms and fishes!"

"That's so," assented Keene. "I hadn't thought of that. Still, a hole in the ground

seems much more natural and homelike. Is yonder the jam where the accident occurred?"

"Yes, it is. I can get you some blue-prints of it, if you'd like to illustrate the story."

"Thanks, but I cannot transmit them in time. I will take the story just as you give it to me, and let it go at that."

"Good for you!" exclaimed Graff, with ill-concealed satisfaction. "I will give you the facts precisely."

Keene knew that he probably would give him quite the opposite of facts, and also that he was seizing upon this opportunity to bring his misrepresentations under the eyes of the insurance people in Boston. And the shrewd detective humored him to the limit of his leaning.

They arrived at the Miller residence a little after twelve. It was a stately wooden dwelling in a retired quarter of the town, with a large stable out back, and broad, well-kept grounds. All about the place were indications of affluence and refinement.

"This pair of reprobates are playing for a stake worth having, to say the least!" thought Keene, as he accompanied Graff up the broad driveway. "And with the hope of taking the last trick, that's plain! But wait till I open my side of the game!"

"Come right in, Mr. Greene," said Graff, entering without ceremony. "Leave your hat and coat here, and take a seat in the reception-room. I will inform Mrs. Miller of your presence."

The detective was not kept waiting long.

The bereaved widow presently put in an appearance, accompanied by Graff, and Keene took her measure at a glance.

Though dressed in black, and with a face now as long as her arm, she was a type distinctively dashing. She was about forty, with a striking figure, a strong face, and an

abundance of yellow hair, which was in some disorder.

She received Keene with decorous gravity, however, and he again stated his mission.

"Directly after lunch," said Mrs. Miller. "I then will give you all the facts about my poor, dear husband. The table now is waiting, so you'll not be long detained."

After the luncheon was ended, which passed without incident, Keene made the play for which he had planned.

"I regret this accident to my hand, which is now quite stiff," he explained, after they had repaired to the library. "I am not sure that I can write legibly with my left, but I'll try."

"Nonsense, Mr. Green!" exclaimed Mrs. Miller. "There is no need of your writing it. Mr. Graff will note down the facts for you, I am sure."

"Of course I will!" exclaimed Graff, the project suiting him to the very letter. "I will write up the story for you precisely as it should appear. How will that do?"

"Nothing could please me better," replied Sheridan Keene, with an appreciation that was decidedly genuine, for this was precisely what he wanted.

It required half an hour, at the end of which time he and Graff left the house in company.

But Sheridan Keene now carried in his pocket not only Graff's own version of the accident, in black and white, but also an elegant specimen of Mr. Graff's hand-writing.

To secure this had been his ultimate aim, moreover, that he might compare it with the signature of Thomas Gaylord on the five-thousand-dollar policy of seven years before.

"When'll this account of the accident go into the Boston papers, Mr. Green?"

"To-morrow morning without doubt," said Keene, readily.

"That's the stuff!" Graff exclaimed, with open satisfaction. "Do you leave town to-day?"

"No, not to-day," said Keene. "I shall wait until Miller's body is found, then I can send in further particulars."

Graff eyed him curiously for a moment, but could discover nothing back of the detective's innocent look. He saw, rather, an opportunity to further secure the publication of his own version of the events to follow; and he impulsively extended his hand.

"Good enough!" he exclaimed. "I think myself that the body will be found, and you'd better stay and get the precise facts. I will give them to you free gratis."

"Thanks! I think so myself," said Keene, heartily. "I will follow your advice."

"Good! Will I see you later?"

"No doubt of it!"

"Good-day, then, till we meet again."

"Good-by!" nodded Keene. "Excuse my leave."

"Don't mention it," laughed Graff; "it's nearest the heart."

"And when I give you my right, it will be nearest your neck," said Keene to himself, as they parted.

CHAPTER V.

KEENE VERIFIES HIS SUSPICIONS.

Besides being a clever detective and a shrewd physiognomist, Sheridan Keene was an expert graphologist.

He had mastered the science of comparing hand-writings to its most minute details, and the most delicate and obscure characteristics of a person's chirography appealed to him with glowing distinctness, presenting features which the novice would be utterly unable to discover, and which the writer himself would be equally unable to disguise.

After leaving Graff to return to his work at the river, Keene hastened to the room

he had secured at the hotel. Having locked himself in his chamber, and laid aside his outer garments, he procured a microscope from his portmanteau and began a comparison of the hand-writing of David Graff with that alleged to have been that of Thomas Gaylord on the policy of seven years before.

The result of his study was precisely what Keene had anticipated. Despite the manifest attempt to forge Gaylord's signature in the policy, the peculiar characteristics of the forger's own hand stood out in bold relief to the eye of this clever student; and the identity of the criminal was as clearly established in the mind of Sheridan Keene as if he had been an eye-witness when the crime was committed.

It convinced the detective of three very important facts.

First, that Graff was the man who had forged the Gaylord policy.

Second, that Graff was the man who had impersonated Gaylord when Dr. Varney made for the Federal company a physical examination of the alleged applicant.

Third, that Graff and Nellie Gaylord had been engaged in criminal co-operation for at least seven years, and that this last horrible crime had, beyond any doubt, been mutually planned and perpetrated after years of deliberate and infamous designing.

At the end of an hour's study Sheridan Keene arose and replaced the microscope in his portmanteau.

His features had grown hard and stern.

He was thinking of the knave from whom he lately had parted; and of the infamous woman who, perhaps at this villainous lover's instigation, had sacrificed two husbands to their greed for fortune.

And he was thinking, too, of the honorable man whose lifeless form might then be lying crushed out of shape and recognition under the jam of logs within a stone's throw

of the great mill his own energy and industry had reared.

"Shocking! Appalling!" he muttered, as he resumed his coat and hat. "But their rope is nearing its end, and the hour of retribution is rapidly approaching. Thank God I now see the way of securing absolute proof of their guilt!"

He left the hotel and went out upon the street.

The excitement had increased.

People were hurrying from their homes, many women among them, and excitedly hastening in the direction of the river.

"What's up?" cried Keene, addressing a man who was running down the street.

The stranger turned back and shouted, over his shoulder:

"They've found it!"

"Found what?"

"Miller's body! They hauled it out from below the jam a half-hour ago!"

And then the man rushed on his way, as if he felt he had lost something desirable by not having been on the spot a half-hour earlier.

"So, so!" said Keene to himself. "Dave Graff has made another move in his desperate game. He shall have free line till after the funeral, and then, the roundup begins."

Keene followed the hurrying people, thinking he, perhaps, might add to his evidence by visiting the scene of the discovery; but, as he was about turning from the main street, he encountered Jim Barry, the coroner, who was hurrying up from the river with a bundle under his arm.

"Hello, Barry!" called Keene, venturing to detain him. "What have you got there?"

"Some o' Miller's clothes," replied the coroner, halting to respond.

"I hear his body has been discovered?"

"Yes; and durned if it ain't a queer thing! I'd a swore they'd never have got it."

"So you said this morning."

"It's all out o' shape, though," cried Barry. "The head's gone completely, and one arm and a foot. Ground off by the logs."

"That's horrible!"

"Ain't it? Come up to my office along with me, and I'll give you all the facts. The press'll kind o' like to know 'em, I reckon."

"You're right, Mr. Barry; and you're very kind," said Keene, hurrying along with him.

"Wal, I sort o' tuk a fancy to yer, Mr. Green."

"Thanks!" exclaimed Keene. "And I rather like you, sir."

"Come on, then."

"Have you ordered the body removed, sir?"

"Yes, I tole Cy Dole to hev it taken up to the widder. 'Twan't no sense leaving it down on the river bank. It's a case of accident, fast enough, and I reckon they'll hev to bury him by to-morrow."

"What garments have you brought up?"

"Just his two coats. They both are like Miller's, and so was the rest o' the suit; so there's no doubt o' the identity o' the body. Then there's some letters in these ere pockets, and they settle it for sure."

"Any objection to my looking at them, Mr. Barry?" asked Sheridan Keene, as they entered the coroner's office, and the latter laid his burden on the table and turned to dry his hands on a towel hung to the closet door.

"None at all," was the reply; "only don't lug off any of them."

"Oh, assuredly not!" said Keene, quickly.

He then made a careful examination of the two garments. They appeared to be nearly new, and evidently had been purchased ready-made. This fact struck Keene as being suspicious, since men of Miller's means usually have their clothes made to order; but the detective did not chance creating mis-

givings in Barry by asking questions relative to Miller's habit in that respect. A little later he learned from others, however, that Miller had been accustomed to buying his clothes ready-made at an establishment in the city of Bangor.

In one of the pockets Keene found three letters, which he likewise examined. Two were addressed to Miller, relating to his business affairs, and bore the date of the previous day.

The third ostensibly was a letter written by Miller himself, and was addressed to a lawyer in Bangor. Superficially, it appeared that Miller had written the letter some hours before his death, and had put it in his pocket until he should visit the post office to mail it.

The letter was brief, and read as follows:

"Mr. R. M. CHASE, Atty., Bangor, Me.:

"Dear Sir—When you can make it convenient to do so, I wish you would run up here for a few hours. Certain rumors reflecting upon my wife have made me very uncomfortable. In fact, I have been almost tempted to put myself out of misery. I wish to discuss the situation with you.

"Yours fraternally,

"CALVIN MILLER."

Keene smiled faintly when he read this brief but quite significant missive.

The moment Keene's eyes had fallen on the hand-writing he had discovered a fact of which he previously had been tolerably convinced. Though the writing presumably was like that of Miller, it nevertheless presented the same obscure peculiarities which the detective had discovered in the Gaylord signature and in Graff's manuscript narrating the recent accident.

"Dave Graff's own hand!" Keene decided, still studying the wet sheet of paper.

This told the whole business.

It plainly indicated that the body was not that of Miller at all!

But whose body was it?

CHAPTER VI.

A BLUFF FOR POSITIVE PROOF.

On the evening of the day following the funeral from the Miller residence a man entered the broad gateway of the surrounding grounds and complacently approached the house.

He had the appearance of a tough sport, and walked like a man who knew his business. His suit was a flashy Scotch plaid, and he wore no overcoat. His hat was pitched well forward; his shoulders were carried with a hunch toward his ears; and he swung a heavy ironwood cane, with a bulldog's head for a handle.

Even his most intimate friends would not have recognized this swaggering young ruffian to be—Sheridan Keene.

It was the detective, nevertheless.

He wanted more direct proof against Graff and Nellie Miller than that based chiefly upon hand-writing, and the circumstantial evidence thus far discovered; and he further wished to learn over whose body the funeral obsequies had recently been held.

Among the persons who had arrived in town late that afternoon, and registered at the hotel, was a man signing himself William Bennett, Bangor, evidently the insurance agent already suspected; and that he would be in consultation with Graff and Nellie Miller at the latter's house that evening Keene had not a doubt.

Hence he had made himself up in a way to preclude recognition, and now was prepared to begin aggressive operations.

It was after dark when he approached the dwelling, but the light of the stars made objects dimly discernible. Yet he failed to observe a dark figure crouching outside under one of the library windows—that of a stout, bearded ruffian, clad in a soiled dog-skin jacket.

Without pausing, Keene ascended the

steps and gave the doorbell a jerk that threatened its wire. The noisy summons had not ceased ringing through the house, when Graff himself appeared on the threshold, and fixed a sharp, resentful look upon the face of the visitor.

"Who are you?" he demanded, bluntly. "And why did you pull our bell like that?"

"Like what?" retorted Keene. "I wanted you to know that I was here. What d'ye suppose I pulled it for? You'll be glad to see me, too, Mr. Graff, when you know my business."

Dave Graff started involuntarily, and his frown became a look of mingled curiosity and distrust.

"I am engaged now," he said, curtly.

"You'd better see me just the same."

"Why had I?"

"'Cause you can't lose anything by seeing a guy who knows what I know, and is having all he can do to hold it."

"What's the nature of your business?" demanded Graff, suspiciously.

Keene leaned forward and whispered, with the manner of one giving friendly warning.

"It's about the little game you're pulling off."

"What little game?"

"Oh, you know well enough!" growled the detective. "There's a party on to you, Dave, and I am on to the party. You'd better interview me, now—see!"

Graff had turned quite pale, yet he succeeded in commanding himself.

Keene realized that he had his man, but he was resolved to have absolute proof, and to solve the entire mystery.

"Come in here!" Graff now commanded. "What's your name, and where do you come from?"

"My name's Bill Kelly, and I——"

"What's the matter, David?" interrupted the voice of Mrs. Miller, from the direction of the dining-room. "Who is there?"

The tone of her voice was sharpened by mingled distrust and apprehension, yet its firmness told Sheridan Keene that she would be a woman of vicious desperation if occasion required.

"Come out this way!" Graff sternly commanded, leading Keene through the hall and into the dining-room. "Do you know this fellow, Nell?"

The room was brightly lighted, but every curtain was closely drawn. The dining-table was laid about as usual; yet some of the pretty china had been roughly pushed out of place, and only a decanter of liquor and several glasses appeared to have been used.

A stout, florid man was seated at one end of the table, whom Keene recognized to be William Bennett, and who was hurriedly concealing a number of insurance policies, which evidently had been under discussion.

Nell Miller was seated at one end of the table, dressed in a loose woolen wrapper, and with her painted features clouded by an ugly frown. She stared up at Keene's hangdog countenance, when he entered, and cried harshly, in response to Graff's blunt question:

"Know him—I should say not! What did you bring him out here for?"

"Oh, well, I know you, Nell Miller," interposed Keene, with menacing emphasis; "or I did when you were Nellie Gaylord, so it's all the same! And I knew your husband, too, Tom Gaylord, the butcher."

The woman turned ghastly for an instant, and started to her feet, crying angrily:

"What do you mean, you scoundrel, by——"

"Oh, sit down," growled Keene, giving his heavy stick an ugly wave, and pushing a chair to the side of the table opposite her. "Don't go off your perch trying to put up a front against me. I'm not half the scoundrel any one of you makes out to be, and I'm here on business—see!"

"You blackguard!" Graff now furiously cried, springing forward with upraised hand. "What do you mean by——"

"Oh, I mean just what I say!" interrupted the detective, suddenly thrusting a revolver under the very nose of the enraged man. "You sit down, too, and don't kick over the traces. I have come here to say something to youse guys, and you're going to hear it—see!"

Nell Miller had dropped back in her chair, dismayed for a moment by their resolute visitor's threatening aspect; and even Dave Graff, who was by no means a coward, shrank from the ominous muzzle of Sheridan Keene's ready weapon.

"Who are you, anyway?" demanded Bennett, quickly seeing the folly of immediate opposition. "And what do you want here?"

"Now you're talking sense, and not through your hat," growled Keene, coolly taking a seat opposite Nell Miller.

"My name's Kelly, and I used to hang out up Worcester way about seven years back," he went on, with a grim display of intimidation.

"Up Worcester way!" gasped the woman.

"Cert, up Worcester way."

"Who is the other party you said was on to some game?" Graff demanded, angrily. "What's the meaning of this outrageous insult?"

"Oh, I am the party, and none other," retorted Keene, with a self-satisfied leer. "You hold your hosses, Dave, till I am ready to tell you. You'll know soon enough who I am, and what I know of the little game you're now pulling off. And I am here to have a hand in it, and to get my little bit—see!"

"You'll get an ounce——"

"I will get just what I am after, Dave; and not an ounce of lead, nor any other kind of knockout drops," interrupted Keene, with a quick display of savage defiance. "You sit

down there, now, and hear what I have to say."

"Sit down," interposed Nell Miller, with a significant glance.

Keene saw murder, even in her fiery eyes, as well as in the angry face of the man who now obeyed her; but he felt equal to handling the entire party without assistance.

"Did you say you once lived in Worcester?" Nell Miller now demanded, glaring sharply across the table at the detective's grim face, as if striving to recall it.

"That's what I said, Nell."

"You're insolently familiar, sir!"

"I can very well be, knowing what I know. Ain't you Nell to your friends?"

"You're no friend of mine."

"You'll find I've been."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I will tell you," said Keene, coolly pouring himself a drink from the decanter. "I used to work for old Dr. Varney, as hostler, seven years ago, Nell. Here's looking at yer!"

As Keene tossed off the liquor, he observed the quick, significant glances between the three, and he knew they now were beginning to suspect his seeming purpose.

But this was precisely what he wanted.

"Suppose you did work for Dr. Varney," cried Nell Miller, sharply. "What's that to me?"

"You'd have thought it was something to you, if I'd told all I knew at the time."

"Told what?" frowned the woman, still very pale.

"Don't you know, Nell?"

"No, I don't! I know only that you're an insolent ruffian!"

Keene laughed grimly, and winked coolly at Dave Graff, chiefly to make sure that he was about to do nothing by which he might be caught unawares.

"Well, Nell, I know it all," cried Keene.

"I know all about you and Dave Graff, and the trick you pulled off up in Worcester; and I knowed it at the time—see!"

"What are you talking about?" Graff again cried angrily. "What trick?"

"The trick by which you and yonder covey, and Nell there, beat the insurance company out of a good, fat thing."

"You're mad!" thundered Graff, furiously.

"No, it's you guys that are mad," grinned Keene, significantly, knocking the edge of the table with his heavy cane. "You are mad because I'm on to your bowling, and now mean to have my little bit. I've waited for it long enough, haven't I?"

Keene saw Dave Graff flash a quick, significant look at Nell Miller's white face; and then Graff sternly cried:

"Address me, you scoundrel, and cease threatening that woman. How dare you come here in such a way as this, and with these outrageous intimations?"

Keene swung round in his chair, and pointed his cane straight at the breast of the irate speaker.

"Because I know they are true, Mr. Graff," he retorted, with ugly decisiveness. "And I knowed it at the time."

"Knew what at the time?"

"That you beat the insurance company out of five thousand dollars."

"How did I beat it?"

"By getting out a policy in the name of Thomas Gaylord, the butcher, who knew nothing at all about it."

"You are wrong about that."

"No, I'm not wrong, and your own face shows it," cried Keene, with subdued ferocity.

"Where were you at the time, that you got this absurd idea?"

"I was Varney's hostler, and I was in his back office when you were examined in the name of Tom Gaylord. You see, Dave Graff, I knew Tom Gaylord as well as you

did; and it didn't take a very long head to tumble to the whole game you had in mind to play. I heard Dr. Varney question you from start to finish, and I knew——"

"See here, Dave!" Bennett suddenly interrupted; "this infernal scoundrel knows too much for his own good, as well as for ours."

Graff paid no attention to the interruption.

He now was anxious, most of all, to learn precisely of what information this ostensible ruffian was possessed.

"If you were in Varney's back office at the time, and suspected the whole scheme," he now cried, with his dark features flushed and distorted; "why did you not disclose it?"

"What could I have made by doing that, you fool?" demanded Keene, with scornful emphasis. "I wanted my finger in the pie, if there was one to be cut, and I allowed I could get my little bit out of you and Nell there; but I got left in that, for the two of you lit out of town before I could nail you."

"That was the reason, was it?"

"That was just it, and nothing else," nodded Keene, drumming grimly with his cane one the table-edge. "But I'm glad of it, now!"

"Glad of it?"

"That's what I said."

"Why so?"

"Because I'll now make sure of getting a bigger bit!" grinned Keene, with a threatening flash of his scowling eyes.

"What do you imply by that?" demanded Graff, darkly.

"Can't you guess?"

"No; I'm not good at guessing the riddles of such fellows as you."

"Well," explained Keene, with a significant leer, "since I've caught you doing a bigger job, my bit will have to be bigger!"

This ominous declaration, made with a significance that would be quite indescribable, sent the color from the face of his every hearer.

Nell Miller half-started from her chair, her teeth showing between her parted gray lips, and but for Graff's interference she would have given voice to her sudden horror and dismay.

"Sit down there, Nell, and keep quiet!" the man forcibly cried, rudely pushing her back to her chair, and seeming finally to grasp the needs of the threatening situation. "Leave this ruffian to me!"

"Don't call hard names," put in the detective, without rising from his chair. "That won't help you out any."

"What do you mean by bigger game?" demanded Graff, turning sharply toward him.

"Just what I say, Mr. Graff."

"Explain yourself."

"That's easy! When I saw by the papers the sudden death of this man Miller, and read about you and Nell, I allowed that I'd found you again, Dave, and that you were up to another game—see! So I came down here to look it over."

"To look what over?"

"The scheme you've been working, of course," cried Keene. "Oh, it's plain enough to me now, Dave, since I find the same old agent here with you."

"What is plain to you? Do you mean to imply——"

"No, I don't imply anything!" cried Keene, as if angrily resenting the other's pretended ignorance. "I don't imply it! I come right down flatfooted, and say it for a fact."

"Say what?"

"That you have done up Miller, as you doubtless did Tom Gaylord seven years ago, sir."

"Silence that man, Dave!" Mrs. Miller screamed, with an irrepressible outburst of terrible passion. "My God! don't you hear what he is saying? Will you listen to——"

"Yes, he'll listen, and so will you, Nell Miller!" interrupted the detective, with grim

ferocity. "Don't think I've not got my eye on you all, for I have! If you try any desperate move against me, somebody'll get hurt! I am here for a hand in this game of yours, and I mean to have it."

"Keep quiet, Nellie!" commanded Graff. "Leave the fellow to me."

"Shut him up, then, or I——"

"Silence, I say! What do you mean, Kelly, if that's your name, by saying that we have done up Calvin Miller?"

"That's what I mean, Mr. Graff, just as you put it."

"But that is absurd! Everybody knows it is."

"I'm the one who happens to know it isn't," retorted Keene, pointedly.

"Miller was drowned."

"Yes, and by your hand, most likely!"

"You——"

"Oh, don't try to bluff me down, Dave! You've played quite a clever game down here, and it'll go all right with those who don't know you as well as I do. It was all very slick, your tumbling Miller into the river at a time when no one would notice, and then springing in an alarm as though 'twere an accident. But I am on to all that, Mr. Graff, and more to go with it!"

Dave Graff stood motionless in the floor, his face utterly void of its normal color, his glowing eyes fixed steadily on the grim face of the resolute speaker.

He thought he now knew what the ruffian's object was in coming there, and he was figuring how to discover just what he had learned, and how he could manage to get the best of him if it came to a physical encounter.

"You think I did that, do you?" he demanded, with a voice so hoarse and strained that it betrayed the stress of feeling he was striving hard to hide.

"I know you did it, Dave!"

"You are wrong."

"Oh, no, I'm not! And I'm not wrong in saying that you and Bennett, and Nell, there, are up to another scheme to get his insurance. D'ye mean to tell me, Dave Graff, that 'twas Miller's body you fished out of the river, when not a man in the town would have believed it could be found?"

"Of course it was Miller's body! Whose else could it have been?"

"And did the clothes it wore belong to Miller? Or were they some you bought at a store down in Bangor? You see, Dave, I've been looking up the case, with an eye to getting my finger in the mess, and I'm on to your pitching."

Graff had staggered slightly, and now grew paler than ever.

The woman opposite the detective suddenly dropped a napkin ring, which she had been viciously fingering, and it rolled off the table and fell to the floor. She pushed back her chair and stooped under the table as if to reach the ring, but within the fraction of a second her real design was apparent.

Sheridan Keene felt himself held fast by both legs, and jerked half out of his chair, while the voice of Nell Miller rang with a scream through the room:

"Seize him, Dave! I've got him by the legs! Secure him, for God's sake!"

It was an artful move, and one well worthy a most desperate and designing woman.

It caught Sheridan Keene from an unexpected quarter, and his legs were held as in a vise.

The movement threw his chair from beneath him. He fell with a crash to the floor, and his revolver was sent flying from his hand.

Instantly both Bennett and Dave Graff were upon him and crushing him down, despite his furious struggle against odds of three to one. Against these odds, even he

possibly might have conquered had not a sudden, sharp blow from his own weapon laid him senseless on the dining-room floor.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RESORT OF DESPERATION.

Half an hour after Sheridan Keene's utterly unexpected mishap, the three criminals, who now had him completely at their mercy, and who had left him bound and gagged upon the cellar floor, were again seated in the Miller dining-room.

The spirit of utter desperation was pictured in the face of one and all.

Although his disguise had been so perfect as to escape detection, it was plain to all that this stranger, who so suddenly had turned up in their midst and confronted them with their crimes, had in some way discovered far more than was consistent with their safety.

"How to get rid of him is the question!" was Nell Miller's bitter exclamation, uttered a moment after Bennett and Dave Graff returned from bearing Keene's senseless form to the basement.

"Get rid of him?" faltered Bennett, pouring himself a drink to steady his shaking nerves. "Must that be done, also?"

"Must it!" cried Nell Miller, who was by far the most desperate of the lot, having the most at stake. "Of course it must be done! It's not a question of whether it must, but how it must!"

"You are right in that, Nell," Graff declared, binding a bruised hand received in the late encounter. "We're in a bad scrape, as the thing now looks. This ruffianly fellow, whoever he is, must be put out of our way."

"Yet he spoke as if willing to take a hand in the game, if he could secure a part of the stake," suggested Bennett, doubtfully. "I don't wholly fancy sending another man to kingdom come. Wouldn't it be safe enough to buy his silence, if it can be done?"

"By thunder—no!" cried Graff, angrily. "Bought silence is never reliable. There's no trusting a scoundrel of his stamp. We should be safe only while his money lasted, and then it would be the same story again."

"That's just the size of it, Dave," said Nellie Miller, grimly. "There is only one safe way of fixing him, and I'll agree only to that one. He took his life in his hands to intimidate us, and his life must be the price of his failure."

"It shall be, Nell."

"There's too much at stake for any other chance to be taken. Who he really is, and where he comes from is what beats me."

"It don't make much difference," said Graff, bluntly. "He certainly has discovered our designs, and means to make the most of it."

"His discovery must cost him his life, then," Nellie Miller forcibly insisted. "What need of delay? Delays are dangerous!"

"It may be just as dangerous were we to kill him in this house," retorted Graff. "He's safe enough for the present."

"But why dangerous?"

"He may have been seen coming here, for one reason."

"That's true."

"Or suppose anything should turn up later, and that this house should be searched. There must be no evidence here of anything like murder. Bloodstains sometimes tell an ugly story, Nell, you know."

"Besides," cried Bennett, whose countenance had grown very dismal over the prospect, "the body would have to be removed from here, and it might not prove very easy to transport it and dispose of it without being seen."

"I should say not," added Graff, decisively.

"Speaking of the body, Dave," the woman now cried, with a sudden start, "I have the very idea."

"About what?"

"How it best may be done! It can be accomplished easily, and two birds killed with one stone."

"Explain!"

"You've not forgotten the casket we robbed, Dave, in order to secure a body to haul from the river and palm off for Miller's?"

"I'm not very likely to have forgotten it," Graff answered, with a growl.

"Then you've forgotten that the casket is still in the Hammond tomb, Dave. You said last night you feared it might be opened some day, and our trick suspected."

"And so it might. Empty caskets aren't usually found in a tomb."

"Fool of a man!" exclaimed Nell Miller, laughing. "Can't you see at what I am driving?"

"No; I'm blessed if I can!"

With an expression of sinister evil on her cold white face, the woman leaned across the table and patted the man on the hand.

"Suppose," she said, with slow significance, "that this ruffian in the cellar could in some way be induced to visit the tomb in our company?"

"Well, what then?"

"Wouldn't it be dead easy, Dave, to dispose of him then and there?"

"Yes, that could be done."

"And suppose you then were to put on him the clothes we took from the Hammond body before clothing it in those like my husband's?"

Graff's grim countenance suddenly brightened as he caught the woman's idea.

"You mean, Nell, to dress Kelly in the garments we took from Hammond and then place him in Hammond's empty coffin?"

"Of course I mean that!" the woman cried, curtly. "That not only would dispose of this ruffian who has come in our way, but also fill the empty box. Then, if it were opened here-

after, who would suspect anything? Hammond's garments would be there, and it's a hundred to one the body would have changed beyond recognition. It's only a bare chance that the casket will ever again be opened, you know. The best of it is, we can thus get rid of this ruffian and easily dispose of his body."

"You are right enough in that."

"The graveyard is secluded enough, and the deed can be done any night without danger if you have sand enough to do it."

"I have sand enough for anything, when there's a fortune at stake," retorted Graff, curtly.

"What are you thinking about, then?"

"I'm trying to think up a way by which the man can be induced to visit the place."

"Where are your brains to-night?" demanded Nell Miller, contemptuously. "That can be easily done."

"How?"

"In this way," she quickly explained, with a readiness indicating her utterly evil and designing nature. "Give the fellow to understand that we have discussed the situation in which his discovery places us, and that we are ready to bribe him to silence."

"Well?"

"Tell him anything whatever that will lead him to believe you mean what you say," continued Nell, forcibly. "Tell him the whole story, Dave, from beginning to end. Even that can do no harm, since a dead man can tell no tales!"

"Go on, Nell."

"If you thus let him into the whole game, Dave, he'll surely believe you, and think you are dealing on the level with him."

"That's true enough."

"Then, after you have told him the whole design, tell him you are ready to pay him his price for silence upon one condition."

"What's the condition?"

"That he will become an accessory to the

crime! That he will do this by lending us a hand in exhuming the body buried from here yesterday, and replacing it in its proper casket in the tomb."

"But——"

"Wait a bit! You will need only to open the Hammond tomb, and pretend you first wish to get the empty casket ready."

"Ah, I get the idea now!" exclaimed Graff, with a quick compression of his lips. "It ought to be easy!"

"Once get him into the tomb, it should be as good as done," said the woman, with vicious eagerness. "A blow on the head, a knife thrust, a bullet, even! The report would not be heard."

"No, there'd be no danger of that, Nell."

"But there is one thing you must be careful to do."

"What's that?"

"You must impress him with the idea that you are asking this in order to make him an accessory, and that your aim in doing it is only to assure yourself of his subsequent silence."

"You can leave that to me, Nell."

"It will blind him to our deeper design, and, in the hope of gain, he will readily assent. Tell him the whole story, Dave! That will surely make him think we are dealing up and up with him, and have really taken him into the game."

"I will go down to him now!" exclaimed Graff, on whom the infamous scheme had made a most favorable impression. "I will have it out with him this very night."

"No, wait!" cried Nell Miller, starting up and detaining him. "Are you sure he is secure until morning?"

"As secure as if already in the tomb!"

"Let him remain where he is, then, until morning."

"Why so?"

"Because too great haste, too ready a con-

sent to his demands, may arouse his suspicion. Let him wait until morning. Then give him to understand that we have spent all night discussing the situation and the safest way of dealing with him. The delay will make our consent all the more credible."

Dave Graff, as great a scoundrel as she, yet without her keenness of perception, gazed down for a moment at her white face and glowing eyes, his own reflecting a quick uprising of fondness and admiration.

"You have a great head, Nell!" he exclaimed, taking her hands. "You should have been a man and a——"

"Ah, but I am glad you're not!" he broke off to explain. "We'll do what you say. Let this man Kelly remain where he lies until morning."

"That's the surest way, Dave."

"And his bed will be broader, and his room a big sight more airy than the one he'll occupy to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAN IN THE DOGSKIN JACKET.

With returning consciousness, the first vague impressions realized by Sheridan Keene were those of a difficulty in breathing and an intense pain in the muscles of his arms.

They were like the horrid sensations of a dream, or a nightmare, and their very poignancy soon brought him to himself with startling abruptness.

Then he found that he was gagged. His arms were secured behind him, and he was lying on them. His feet were bound together and fastened to the floor on which he was lying, with only a few rags and pieces of burlap under him.

By partly turning on his side he relieved the pain in his cramped muscles, and set his mind at work to fathom his present predicament and surroundings.

He quickly remembered the scene in the dining-room, and the sudden artful strategy of Nell Miller by which he had been worsted.

"The devil take her! Only a woman could have fooled me in that way," he said to himself as his mind became clearer. "This is what comes of looking for absolute evidence. But I'll turn the tables on them yet."

He could not have told as quickly, however, by what means it was to be accomplished, for the hands that had secured the ropes by which he was bound had done their work well. Though he strained his powerful arms until the bones cracked, he could not stir his bonds by the breadth of a hair.

Then he fell to listening, and to straining his eyes to penetrate the intense darkness. Through a single window only, higher than the floor on which he was lying, he could see the glimmer of stars; and he finally heard the sound of moving feet overhead, and then realized that he had been brought into the cellar or basement for safe keeping.

"It'll be a sorry day for them if they fail to make a complete job of this and finish me up entirely," he decided, grimly. "That's their only hope, if they only know it."

Had he known their actual sentiments and design he would have bothered his head no more about it, but have made himself as comfortable as possible, and tried to sleep away the time until morning.

After what seemed like an endless interval, he heard a clock strike in the hall above. "Midnight!"

Then he heard the fall of moving feet again; and then followed another long period of absolute silence.

He turned once more to his side, and fell to staring through the narrow window at the stars, hoping the clock would strike again, and tell him the passing of another hour.

Presently, against the starlight outside, he saw a pair of legs pass the cellar window.

"What does that mean?" he involuntarily asked himself. "Some one is prowling about outside!"

As if in answer to the mute questions that flashed through his mind, he soon heard a sound different from any that yet had reached his ears.

It was like the grating of an iron bar on a stone; and presently it was followed by the faint grating of rusty hinges.

Then a faint light permeated the darkness, and he saw that a bulkhead door was being very cautiously opened; and again the pair of legs was discernible outside.

"I guess they are about to finish up the job," said Keene to himself.

He waited and watched, then felt a thrill of hope.

The bulkhead door had been opened to its full extent, and there was apparently but one person outside.

"A burglar! Some one breaking into the house!" decided the detective. "By Jove! I hope he'll stumble over me!"

Then the legs started down the stone steps from the ground above.

They were followed by a human trunk, on which was a human head, and presently the figure of a man, a little darker than the surrounding darkness, stood motionless in the cellar floor.

Keene held his breath and waited.

Then the sudden flare of a match dispelled the darkness, and the detective beheld once more the bushy black beard and soiled dog-skin jacket of the disguised man he had met on the river bank two days before.

"The logger from up Canada way!"

The stranger discovered the detective at the same moment, and instantly extinguished the match.

The next moment Keene felt the man's hands laid on him, and knew that he was kneeling by his side. The hands felt above his heart, as if to sense its beating; and then

a low, cautious whisper came through the darkness.

"You're alive! Are you conscious, also?"

Keene could not reply in words, but he gave his body a wriggle, signifying that he was very much alive, and understood what had been said.

"You are lucky!" whispered the stranger. "You have a tough, hard head, to have stood the crack they gave you!"

Then the hands pawed over his face till they discovered why he had made no verbal response.

"Oh, you're gagged!"

Keene gave another wriggle, and wagged his head violently, trying to make the man understand that he wanted to have the gag removed.

But the fellow in the dogskin jacket did not, or would not, understand.

Instead of removing the gag, he bent lower and whispered:

"Listen to me! Can you hear me?"

Keene bent his head in the affirmative.

Then the stranger's low voice became more bitter and intense.

"You're getting what you deserve," he said, slowly; "for you're plotting to secure blood-money! Money secured by the blood of a man who never did you a wrong!"

Once more Keene wriggled violently, but the fellow beside him would not understand.

"You deserve the fate designed for you, yet I shall stand in the way of those who would slay you, and prevent the sacrifice of your life. But your obedience to my commands must be my reward for the service I do you. Do you hear me and understand?"

Keene nodded, wondering what was to follow.

"Your life is in danger," the stranger continued. "Listening outside, I overheard the plot for your destruction. You are to be told the whole story of Calvin Miller's mur-

der, in order that you will believe that these knaves intend to deal fairly with you, and mean to comply with your demands. Do you understand me, and appreciate their motive?"

Keene gave a low grunt of affirmation.

"Note me, then," the man continued. "You then are to be induced to visit a tomb in a lonely graveyard back here a piece, in which there is a casket that has been robbed of its dead. Once having been inveigled into the place, your life is to be taken and your body placed in the empty casket. Do you follow me?"

The detective, thrilled now with growing satisfaction, quickly bowed his head.

The stranger bent lower.

"That is the plot of these knaves by which to remove you," he continued, with suppressed intensity. "But their design must be foiled. Their crime must be brought home to them. The whole truth must be learned by you when they attempt to mislead you through their own betrayal. They will make these disclosures with the assurance that your lips will be sealed by death. Once more, do you understand?"

Once more the detective eagerly nodded.

"They must be arrested at the tomb! They shall be arrested at the tomb!" repeated the stranger, with intensely bitter significance. "Do you now see that their downfall is certain, and that you can gain nothing from them?"

Keene quickly bowed.

"And will you now pledge yourself to obey me, and to follow my commands to the letter? The absolute proof of their guilt must be secured, and by you. Will you swear to follow my commands?"

Keene signified his immediate assent, and once more made a desperate attempt to show that he wanted the gag removed, that he might speak.

But the man kneeling by his side now said, quickly:

"No, I'll not release you! I will take no chances that they suspect this visit. The alteration of a single knot might be detected, and alarm them. You must lie here until morning. This shall be your only punishment for seeking blood-money. In the morning they will come to your relief. Once more, do you promise to obey me to the very letter?"

With an effort, Keene muttered a quick and eager assent.

The man in the dogskin jacket again bent lower.

"Listen," he said, softly; "these are my commands!"

CHAPTER IX.

GRAFF FOLLOWS NELL MILLER'S ADVICE.

The day dawned, and the light of the morning sun came stealing into the cellar where Sheridan Keene was lying.

It was a welcome sight, indeed; yet even less welcome than the tread of moving feet overhead. The latter gave him hope that ere long some one of the inhuman knaves by whom he had been bound would come to his relief.

Nearly an hour passed, however, before the cellar door was opened and the heavy tread of a man sounded on the stairs.

Then Keene beheld Dave Graff approaching him, bearing a cup of coffee and a plate of food.

"Well, Kelly, you're still here," he observed, cheerfully, setting down the plate and cup on the floor.

Keene glanced up at him in helpless silence.

"Don't look ugly, Kelly!" laughed the knave. "You've had to take a nasty dose of medicine, but you invited it when you interfered with our little game. Steady a bit and I'll fix you so you can wag your jaw again."

He bent down and raised the detective's head and removed the gag from his mouth.

"Now you're off," he said, bluntly; "but take heed how you use your tongue."

It was some moments before Sheridan Keene could use it at all, then he said, dryly:

"Give me that coffee, will you?"

"Sure thing, Kelly," cheerfully exclaimed Graff, raising him to a sitting posture. "Drink it down; there's more where that came from."

Keene swallowed the coffee with genuine eagerness, and new life coursed through his veins.

"You've handled a fellow infernally rough," he said, bitterly, raising his gaze to the man standing in the floor. "But I'll yet play even with you!"

"Yes, Kelly, no doubt of it. But in a way you don't anticipate," said Graff, sitting himself on the chopping-block near by. "Will you have a bite to eat?"

"Not now; I can't swallow it yet."

"Well, it is here when you want it."

"What are you going to do with me?" growled Keene, with an angry glance. "Keep me here in this infernal shape?"

"Well, that depends on you, Kelly," said Graff, resting his hands on his knees and staring down at his hearer.

"If it depends on me, I'll soon be out of here."

"You'll go out when we think best," retorted Graff. "We've spent most all night discussing your case, my man, and we now have made up our minds what to do with you."

"I suppose you mean, how you will do it."

"No, not how! We have decided not to do you up, as you really deserve; but we'll take you into the game, instead, if you'll come to our terms."

Keene allowed his grim countenance to relax a little and manifested an agreeable surprise.

"Do you mean it?" he demanded, eagerly.

"Sure, I mean it," Graff gravely nodded.

"We'll do the square thing by you, as far as money goes, since you have tumbled to our desperate game; but we must have some assurance that you will never betray us."

"I'll give you any I can."

"That's what you'll have to do."

"What'll it be?"

"We want you to take a hand in some work yet to be done, so that you'll be in the same boat with us. If you'll do that, we then shall feel sure you will not betray us, since by so doing you would betray yourself also. Do you see?"

"Cert, I see, since I am not blind," retorted Keene. "And I'll do it!"

"You will?"

"Why not? I am not afraid to take any chances you dare take, and don't you forget it. There's one thing I want to be sure of, and that is my little bit."

"You shall have that as soon as we get ours."

"That's good enough for me, Mr. Graff," said Keene, readily. "What's the job to be done?"

Graff kicked an empty box nearer and sat down upon it.

"I'll have to explain the whole business, in order for you to understand," he replied. "You see, we mean to deal up and up with you, from this out, and expect the same from you."

"You'll have no cause to doubt it, I give you my word."

"I want a stronger hold on you than that, and I mean to have it," said Graff, bluntly.

"Now, listen to me."

"Ain't that what I'm doing?"

"See that you do," returned Graff.

"You've got an idea that we killed Tom Gaylord seven years ago, in order to realize on

an insurance policy. You're wrong in that, Mr. Kelly."

"Am I?"

"Yes, you are. Tom Gaylord died a natural death, of consumption. The only game that we worked at that time, was securing a policy on Gaylord by substituting another man for the medical examination, and by working the deal through Bennett, the agent."

"You were the man, Dave Graff," said Keene, grimly.

"That's true enough, and I don't mind admitting it since you're to be one of us from now on. I was the man, and I figured as Gaylord, and signed the policy, and all that. But we did nothing to hasten Gaylord's death, Mr. Kelly, and you're away off if you think so. Gaylord was already half-dead of consumption when we secured the policy."

"I will take your word for it," said Keene, with a nod. "I only judged by appearances—see!"

"Now, as to the other game, it's cloth of another color," said Graff; "and in going into that you are taking the chance of a hemp necktie."

"I said I would take any chance you will," said Keene, shortly.

Graff drew his seat nearer, even, and followed Nell Miller's advice. Had the woman been there, with her keen discernment, she would have decided the disclosure to be needless, and that the consent of the man was already won; but Dave Graff followed her instructions to the limit.

"This, then, was the game!" he said, softly. "Years ago, before Nell married Tom Gaylord, this Miller was a very close friend of hers, and wished very much to marry her. She sent him by the board, however, and took up with Gaylord."

"Him as died a natural death; I understand!" nodded Keene.

"Of course!" growled Graff. "That was fifteen years ago or more. Miller, during this time did not marry. But he always had kept track of Nellie Gaylord, and the butcher was no sooner laid in the grave than Miller showed up at Nell's home and resumed his attentions. Do you see?"

"Ay, I see. He was badly gone on her, wasn't he?"

"Badly for a fact!"

"Where did you come in?"

"Never mind where I came in," snarled Mr. Graff. "But I always was closer to the woman's heart than either of them, take my word for that."

"I guess I'm safe enough in taking it!"

"When I discovered Miller's object, and that he had money," continued Graff, "I put Nell up to the trick we since have pulled off. She cared nothing for him, mind you, and was in love with me; but I drove her into marrying him, and she came down here to live, and I after her.

"Having Miller well under thumb, she found it easy to influence him into taking out a large insurance on his life; and I, meantime, had looked up Bennett, our previous confederate, who had succeeded in getting the agencies of several new companies, and had taken an office in Bangor."

"So it was a case of the same old game," said Keene, dryly. "You see I was on to it all right, Mr. Graff."

"And now you are into it all right," said Graff, significantly.

"Well, I'm not sorry for that, since I'm to be in on the profits also!"

"The game was much more dangerous than our first one," continued Graff, with a shake of his head; "for it required Miller's removal, and in a way to avoid awakening suspicions."

"Did you plan it, Mr. Graff?"

"Nell and I planned it together. But I did most of the work."

"It wasn't bad, at that."

"It was so good that you are the one and only man who has suspected it," said Graff, decisively; "and you would not have thought of it, save that you knew of the previous case."

"Aye, sir; that's true enough."

"It was done in this way," Graff continued,

with a manifest satisfaction in extolling his own infamous work.

"We prepared everything beforehand, to make it appear that Miller's death was due to an accident. I purchased in Bangor a suit and overcoat like those habitually worn by Miller, and Nell hid them in the house. In the pocket I put several letters the day before the trick was turned, indicating that Miller had received them, and that one had been written by him, hinting that he had suicide in mind."

"You did this to suggest that theory, in case the accident was regarded suspiciously, eh?"

"Certainly; that was my reason."

"A clever precaution, too!"

"I thought so," nodded Graff. "It served for an anchor to the windward, in event of need."

"But why did you see a need for the extra suit of clothing?"

"Because I had planned to do the job immediately after the death of a man named Hammond, who lives up above here."

"Was he sick?"

"Yes, of acute Bright's disease," nodded Graff.

"You see, Kelly," he went on, "I knew I could not tumble Miller into the river while the stream is running so high and the logs are so badly jammed, with any hope of afterwards securing his body. There would have been little or no hope of recovering that, as everybody knows."

"I suppose you wanted the body, however, in order to get the insurance more readily?"

"That was it, precisely!"

"So you decided to make use of Hammond's body, after he died, did you?"

"That was the very trick," admitted Graff, with a smile of grim satisfaction. "His family own a tomb up here in the graveyard, which made it dead easy to secure the body after its disposal there. Bennett and I got it the night after the funeral, and concealed it under our stable out yonder. He was about the same size as Miller, and we dressed him in the clothes I had purchased in Bangor, and in some of Miller's undergarments which Nell provided; and after mutilating in a way

to preclude recognition, we sunk it under the logs below the dam."

"I am on to the whole scheme, now," said Keene, with a nod of approval. "It was very shrewdly planned, Mr. Graff, from start to finish."

"It would have worked all right, but for you."

"But I am not in the way of it, now, man!"

"See that you are not."

"How did you manage to get Miller out on the jam with you that night?"

"I took a time when our movements would not probably be observed, and asked him to come out with me and look at the jam, and consider a plan I had in mind for clearing it. He suspected nothing, and readily consented. I kept constantly near him, and when I had him well out on the logs, I took a favorable opportunity and shoved him into the river."

"Did he sink out of view?"

"He went straight over the ends of the logs and out of sight. I was sure the current would sweep him under the jam, and I made only a bluff at trying to save him, in case our movements had been observed from a distance, and then I ran back to the shore and gave the alarm."

"No one had seen you, eh?"

"Not a soul!"

"You played lucky in that."

"I had made fairly sure of it before I took the chance."

"At all events, Mr. Graff, you are a man of sand," nodded Keene, with a display of grim approval. "The whole game is plain enough now, sir; and so it was before, as far as that goes, all but the details. Now, what is this job I am to do?"

"We wish to exhume the body of Hammond, which was buried from here yesterday, and replace it in his casket in the tomb, in case it should ever be opened."

"But I've heard there was no head on the body," growled Keene.

"We have that," explained Graff, with a ready lie; "and we will take it back up there with us; also the clothes we took from Hammond's body. By doing this work, you see, we shall have fixed things in the tomb all right, and we already know that the grave

Miller is now supposed to occupy will never again be opened."

"That's plain enough," said Keene, gravely. "And what do you want of me?"

"We want you to help us do the job. That will make you, in the sight of the law, one of the parties to the entire crime."

"Is that all you want?"

"That's enough, isn't it?" demanded Graff, with a shrug of his broad shoulders.

A low laugh issued from the lips of the ostensible ruffian lying opposite. With a contemptuous sneer, he cried, bluntly:

"That's next to nothing at all, Mr. Graff! I'll do the whole job alone, if you say but the word, and so be it that's all you want!"

"We don't want you to do it alone; we are ready to do our part. Besides, I wish to direct the way it shall be done."

"Any old way will suit me," returned Keene, indifferently.

"And this is final, then? You will take a hand in the work?"

"Haven't I already said so? Of course I will!"

"That settles it, then!" exclaimed Graff, approvingly, as he rose to his feet. "You shall be considered one of us from the moment the work is done."

"I'm as good as that now," cried Keene; "so loose up these lines a bit, and let me stretch my legs."

"Not quite yet, Mr. Kelly," Graff firmly rejoined. "We will take no chance with you until the work is done. After that, we are friends with you."

"But when is it to be done?" demanded Keene, with feigned anger. "I don't want to lie here much longer."

"It shall not be long," replied Graff, assuringly. "We will wind up the thing this very night."

CHAPTER X.

AT THE TOMB.

"I will go along with you!" was Nell Miller's decisive exclamation that night, when this party of knaves, Sheridan Keene of their number, were about starting for the lonely graveyard on the outskirts of the town.

"You, Nell?" demanded Graff, doubtfully.

"Yes, I!" was the firm response. "In case we by any chance are caught up there, my presence would perhaps explain all. I could claim that you accompanied me there, and that I had remained there since early evening by the grave of my dead husband."

Graff gave vent to a coarse laugh.

"Always a level head, Nell!" he exclaimed, admiringly. "Get yourself ready, then. You shall go by all means. Mourning at the grave of her husband, eh!"

Keene said very little, but he thought volumes, and could see the speedy finish of these ghouls and outlaws.

A little later the four were stealing through the deserted streets of the town, with their steps turned in the direction of the graveyard. It was nearly one o'clock in the morning, and not a person was encountered on the way.

They entered the cemetery gate and secured it after them; then Dave Graff silently led the way towards that portion of the yard in which the Hammond tomb was located.

Bennett carried under his arm a large bundle, containing the clothing which had been taken from Hammond's body, which was conclusive evidence that these were the parties guilty of the desecration already committed. Keene carried under his arm two spades and a hoe.

Their way led toward the rear of the silent and secluded cemetery, and presently Dave Graff drew back, and slipped his hand through Keene's disengaged arm.

"Yonder is the tomb," he said, softly. "I have a key that will open the door."

"Do you mean the tomb built in under the bank there?"

"Yes; the nearest one."

"Where's the grave that's to be opened?"

"It is a little distance beyond, on the opposite side of the pathway."

"I'll go to work on that whenever you say," said Keene, agreeably.

"Not yet," replied Graff. "I first want to get the tomb open, and have the casket ready."

"That's right enough."

"Have you got the screwdriver?"

"Here in my pocket."

"I will unlock the tomb, and we'll open the casket together. You don't mind going in there with me?"

"I should say not!" growled Keene, with a swagger. "It's live bodies I'm afeared of, not dead ones."

"Come on, then."

Bennett and Nell Miller drew nearer, while Graff was busy unlocking the heavy door and swinging it open. The vicious interest of their female companion surpassed even Sheridan Keene's understanding.

"Got the lantern there, Bill?" demanded Graff.

"Yes; ready and lighted."

"Let's have it."

Graff took the dark lantern from Bennett's hand, and flashed its yellow rays through the gloom of this damp and grewsome receptacle for the dead.

Then he felt to make sure his revolver was loose in his hip pocket.

"Come on, Kelly," he said, with an unconscious display of grim desperation.

Keene followed him through the narrow door, and they stood in the vault together.

A new box and casket occupied a position at one side, upon two others of much older date.

"Hold the lantern up here!" growled Keene, feigning to fish in his pocket for the screwdriver, and to begin his work with genuine zest. "Flash the glimmer on the top here, so as I can see the screws."

Graff decided to wait until the lids had been removed before he ventured attempting the final tragic act.

With his left hand, he raised the lantern as directed, flashing the circle of light upon the surface of the plain pine box; but with his right he drew his revolver, and held it parallel with his thigh.

Within a quarter-minute Sheridan Keene had removed the cover of the outer box.

He seemed to have no consciousness of any danger by which he was threatened.

At that moment Sheridan Keene made a discovery that required all the coolness he possessed to conceal, although he had been warned by his midnight visitor to be prepared for it.

The sides of both the outer box and of the

casket nearest the wall of the tomb had been removed!

Evidently his companions were not aware of this fact.

Without an instant's hesitation he quickly removed the lid from the inner casket.

The rays from the lantern still in David Graff's hand flashed directly into it.

And they fell, not upon an empty coffin, but upon a pale, composed face that Dave Graff knew only too well.

It was the face of Calvin Miller, whom he had supposed to have been drowned; and a scream like that of frenzy broke from Graff's startled lips.

"Miller—oh, my God!"

"Miller—and alive!" came the stern response, and the figure lying there suddenly sprang out upon the floor.

The lantern fell to the ground at Graff's feet, but his revolver rose like a flash.

"Drop it!" cried Sheridan Keene, with a blow that nearly broke the man's wrist, and sent the weapon flying from his hand. "You are under arrest, David Graff, and all your party! Seize him, Mr. Miller, and bring him out this way."

And Sheridan Keene strode quickly into the open air.

There a genuine surprise awaited him.

Standing some twenty feet away were Jim Barry, the coroner, with a half-dozen men, by whom Nell Miller and Bennett already had been taken into custody, and subjected to an enforced silence.

Keene turned back on observing them, and now beheld Graff roughly brought from the tomb by a stout man clad in black, and with a pale and refined, yet very forceful countenance.

"Are you Mr. Calvin Miller?" he demanded, sternly.

"Of course I am!" cried the other. "But do you mean to tell me you are not the ruffian I last night imagined you?"

"I'm no ruffian, by any means, sir!" returned Keene, throwing off a portion of his disguise. "I am Sheridan Keene, a Boston detective, sent here by the Federal Insurance Company to run down this pack of knaves."

"Ah, sir! I should have guessed it!" cried

Miller. "If I had known of this last evening——"

"You might have known it," interposed Keene, "if you had loosed the gag which compelled my silence. For I suspected you were Miller the moment you revealed your design to arrest these persons at this tomb, and thus secure all the evidence needed to convict them. Come, Mr. Graff, your game is up, you see, and the penalty awaits you."

"Come here, Mr. Barry," cried Miller, beckoning to the coroner. "Relieve Mr. Keene of this scoundrel, and lock him up with the other two. I will see to closing up this tomb, and to-morrow will pay you for your services here to-night. As for yonder woman I do not wish to see her again. Mr. Keene, you kindly remain with me?"

From the moment of his arrest, not a word had issued from Graff's ashy lips, and he was marched away in utter silence.

The startling culmination of that night's work may be briefly explained.

Contrary to David Graff's belief at the time of the alleged accident, Calvin Miller had not been drowned. Although he had been carried out of Graff's sight by the sweep of the stream, he had succeeded in seizing the end of one of the logs just out of observation, to which he had clung until after the search was ended that evening, and then had succeeded in making the shore.

Instead of at once denouncing Graff, he had been led, by the past doubtful conduct of his wife, to suspect that the design which had led Graff to commit such a heinous crime might involve her also. With a determination to learn the whole truth, he had, with the aid of a friend to whom he confided the situation, procured a disguise, and fell to watching the inmates of his own house.

The result was that he had overheard the interview of the previous evening, and supposed that Sheridan Keene was the type of character he appeared. He had seen him overcome and placed in the cellar, and later had heard the plan suggested by Nellie Miller to effect his removal.

A visit to Keene in the cellar followed, as described, and in order to secure all the evidence essential to the conviction of Graff for the attempted murder and the outrage of the

Hammond tomb, Miller had carried the affair to the culmination depicted.

The end of the case may be briefly stated.

Each of the three parties to the crime received a long term in the Maine State prison, and at its expiration a warrant for their re-arrest by the Massachusetts authorities will await them.

A month subsequent to the conviction and imprisonment of his wife, Calvin Miller applied for and was granted a decree of absolute divorce.

To Sheridan Keene he related the entire history of his past infatuation, telling him the story the evening before Keene returned to Boston with his report to President Berkley; but the history of this honorable man's blind affection, which had led him almost over the threshold of death's door, requires no record in these pages.

THE END.

Next week's SHIELD WEEKLY (No. 13) will contain, "In Bad Hands; or, Sheridan Keene's Help to Some Country Visitors."

SHIELD WEEKLY.

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No. 11.—Under the Knife; or, The Cloak of Guilt.

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No. 10.—A Frozen Clue; or, The Cold Storage Mystery.

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